Bandits and Boundaries : Robber Bands and Secret Societies on the Dutch Frontier (1730-1778)

著者	BLOK Anton
会議概要（会議名，開催地，会期，主催者等）	オランダ，ライデン，1999年10月 27日-29日
page range	181-202
year	2001-03-30
シリーズ	ヨーロッパ国際シンポジウム 1999 International Symposium in Europe 1990
URL	http://doi.org/10.15055/00001563

Bandits and Boundaries: Robber Bands and Secret Societies on the Dutch Frontier (1730-1778)

Anton BLOK
University of Amsterdam

> The strength of collective biography is not in supplying alternative explanations, but in specifying what is to be explained. Historians who have specified what is to be explained via collective biography often find themselves turning to explanations stressing the immediate setting and organization of everyday life, or relying on something vaguely called "culture." That moves them back to anthropology.
>
> Charles Tilly

Banditry has been identified as the easiest form of rebellion because it is the most difficult for states to counteract, especially in mountainous frontier zones where central authority is weak (cf. Wallerstein 1974:141-2; Braudel 1973:745-6). A case in point is the so-called *Bokkeryders* ("goat riders"), who in three successive episodes between 1730 and 1774 operated in the hinterland of Maastricht -- the border area between the Dutch Republic, the Duchy of Gulick, and the Austrian Netherlands. It took the local authorities in these fragmented territories well over forty years to come to terms with a form of banditry that easily survived the first two efforts in the 1740s to repress it.[1]

The raids of the bands fell into three distinct periods, each of which came to an end with mass arrests, trials, and executions in the hometowns of the convicts. The first period (1730-1742) saw more than sixty outings, most of which were directed against churches, though ten raids involved massive attacks on farms, inns, and rectories. The second phase (1749-1750) included just two operations and was for the most part a short-lived revival of what had remained of the earlier bands. In the third phase (1751-1774) the ranks of the robbers swelled considerably. Assorted local bands participated in several large-scale attacks against a dozen farms, two rectories, one hermitage, one monastery, and one church. As had happened in the early 1740s, a haphazard outing not authorized by the leaders and carried out toward the end of 1770 led to the discovery and subsequent demise of the robber bands in the Lower Meuse.

In the early stages of Lower Meuse banditry, most of the robbers came from the easternmost enclaves of the Austrian Netherlands and the adjoining reaches of the Duchy of Gulick. The Dutch territories were only modestly represented at that time, by the towns of Nieuwstadt and Heerlen. Later, large groups of people from neighbouring Dutch districts joined in the raids, while some Austrian territories and the Duchy of Gulick stopped being important areas of recruitment. All attacks took place late in the evening or in the early morning. During these nocturnal ventures the robbers looked for money, jewellery, clothing, food, and other valuable goods. Victims were often maltreated (to make them talk first and to keep them quiet after), and some of them lost their lives. But not all operations involved the same amount of violence, nor were they all equally successful. Several important outings failed -- some, because the victims or their neighbours managed to give the alarm; others, because the robbers found only items of little value. It is significant that on a number of occasions, most notably during the large-scale operations in 1770, the victims were conspicuously spared, if they woke up at all.

How many people actually participated in the operations of the bands we cannot possibly know. What we do know is that about 600 people were tried for being members of the "notorious band" and that many others fled and successfully avoided prosecution. In the early 1740s, about 170 people appeared before local courts. The defendants included well over twenty women; most of them were linked to band members through kinship, marriage, or concubinage. About ten years later, some thirty people were tried, including five men who had also been active in the first period. During the trials of the 1770s, close to 400 people, including six women, were convicted. In all, I could trace more than 500 verdicts, all of which were carried out. Most of these convictions involved sentences of death by hanging, burning, or the rack. **(table 1, table 2)**

This article seeks to trace the development of two forms of collective violence: banditry and its repression. It has been argued that no simple distinction between instrumental and symbolic practice makes sense anywhere: instrumental action is always simultaneously semantic (Comaroff 1985:125; cf. Leach 1966:403-4 and 1976:9). Directed against property and people (expropriation and elimination), both forms of violence include a powerful cultural import affecting the reputation and social status of all *dramatis personae*.

We notice, first, that the occupational backgrounds of the robbers, their kinship structure, and their place of origin strongly favoured the development of banditry in the Lower Meuse and, of course, also militated against stopping or controlling it. Second, we will see that the military and political history of the area is crucial for understanding

the rise and fall of the *Bokkeryders*. The bands emerged sometime after 1730 in a peripheral area characterized by a high degree of territorial fragmentation which had resulted from a long period of wars. This raises a third issue: the means the local authorities could deploy to control the bands. Fourth, in studies of popular collective violence, the issue of "claims" usually looms large. Claims may be obvious when we deal with tax revolts, conscription riots, and similar examples of popular politics. But in cases of organized banditry, claims are less clear, or at least difficult to pinpoint, since motives, goals, and agendas vary among participants and also change over time. This may be one reason why banditry, often itself elusive, diffuse, and intermittent, does not take up a prominent place in studies of collective action.[2] Writing about banditry in sixteenth-century Mediterranean countries, Braudel characterized it as a "cruel, everyday war hardly noticed by traditional historians, who have left what they consider a secondary topic to essayists and novelists" (1973:745). Before returning to the issue of claims, we look at the context in which the bands took shape.

The Area

The *Bokkeryders* operated in the Lower Meuse, in the rural area enclosed by the towns of Maastricht, Aix-la-Chapelle, Gulick, and Roermond. **(map 1)**

From the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, this area was part of a larger military frontier zone, with Maastricht as a strong fortress and garrison town and Liège as an important centre of the arms industry. It was in the Lower Meuse, at the crossroads of major east-west and north-south thoroughfares, that the spheres of influence of the great European powers touched and often collided. France, Spain, the Dutch Republic, Austria, and later Prussia disputed sovereignty over this part of Europe. Up to the early eighteenth century, the area had suffered from frequent military operations and subsequent territorial fragmentation, most notably the division of the so-called *Landen van Overmaas* between the Dutch Republic and Spain in 1662. Including Dutch and Spanish (after 1713, Austrian) territories, together with sections of the Duchy of Gulick and various semi-autonomous *seigneuries*, it was, in several respects, a border area par excellence.[3]

Apart from the political frontiers there were many different legal jurisdictions, and the boundary dividing Protestants from Roman Catholics -- the result of the Protestantisation that the Dutch (largely unsuccessfully) tried to impose on their territories -- ran right across the area. The transitional character of the entire region was reinforced by its location on commercial and military crossroads. Situated in a major European interaction zone, the Lower Meuse connected Flanders with the Rhineland

and the Dutch Republic with the Southern Netherlands and France. Finally, we should note the extremely peripheral location of the Dutch and Austrian territories of the Lower Meuse with respect to their political centres -- The Hague and Brussels. Disconnected from the other parts of the Dutch Republic and the Austrian Netherlands, respectively, these fragmented territories constituted true exclaves.

At a time when there were no barracks, this part of the Lower Meuse -- a fertile region of mixed farming where large, often fortified tenant farms prevailed among patches of veld, wood, and heather -- was much sought after as winter quarters for armies. As a deep hinterland of Maastricht, part of the area also functioned as a granary for the city and its garrison. But these resources also invited the scourge of disbanded soldiers, of which any number of villages in the area had received their share. There were several industries in the area, not only in the towns but also in the villages, which produced textiles, metal, and leatherwork. The entire region formed an offshoot of the important industrial concentration around Liege (Thurlings and Van Drunen 1960). Apart from agriculture, therefore, people lived off commerce and several rural domestic manufactures.

These arrangements reflected a highly stratified, "seigneurial" social formation, which included a landed gentry and clergy who lived comfortably in splendid country houses, including the famous monastery Rolduc, and controlled most of the land; a group of landowning farmers who also managed the tenant farms; and a larger, more diversified group of artisans, labourers, and retail merchants with little or no property. The local courts and other public offices were staffed by gentry and farmers. The power of landlords, clerics, and farmers was also vested in the images of authority and subordination -- in the architecture of the courtroom and the gallows, the country houses and castles, the monastery, and the scattered, walled-in tenant farms -- and should therefore be understood in terms of cultural hegemony as well. Together with the lifestyle, dress, and gestures of the gentry, these houses and spaces were part of the orchestration of aristocratic power.[4]

The Bands

From about 1730 through 1774 numerous Roman Catholic churches and farms in this part of the eastern Meuse valley were plundered in nocturnal outings by the *Bokkeryders*. The collective biography of the *Bokkeryders*, which I composed on the basis of court records, reveals that these people were not bandits, that is, "outlaws," in the strict sense of the term. On the contrary, virtually all of them led ordinary lives in their home towns. Most of them were married with children and had a fixed residence.

In fact, many were born and had grown up in the same area in which they carried out their raids -- the politically fragmented territories north of Maastricht and Aix-la-Chapelle. Some of them lived in the same village as their victims, and a few were even their close neighbours.

Familiarity with the victims may explain the various forms of disguise that the robbers adopted. They operated by night; hence their nickname, *nachtdieven* ("night thieves"). We know that female participants dressed as men, while the men often wore military attire and used military idiom. Others blackened their faces and put on visors, wigs, false beards, caps, and other outlandish headgear "in order not to be recognized," as one of the accused explained in court. It should not surprise us, then, that the robbers fled when the victims succeeded in raising the alarm and mobilizing their neighbours, as happened on various occasions. As local people, the *Bokkeryders* had good reason to fear recognition; they were part-time robbers, organized in secret societies of sorts, with dual identities, whose secret part they concealed behind their public face as ordinary villagers and workmen.[5]

Looking at the occupational background of the robbers (which I could trace for two-thirds of them), one finds artisans (skinners, saddlers, shoemakers, ironworkers, spinners, weavers) and retail merchants (peddlers, carters, cattle dealers) strongly represented. Together they made up about sixty percent of the participants in all three stages of band operations, while farmers and day labourers accounted for scarcely twenty percent. In a distinctly rural area, people of agrarian background remained notably under-represented. **(table 3)**

Rural artisans, most notably skinners, played pivotal roles in the bands. In fact, the first bands coalesced around a widely extended network of skinners from no less than ten different places. It was the skinners' job to kill sick animals, to dispose of dead cattle, to flay horses, and to remove other organic remains from public domains. Skinners also assisted the executioner in the sessions of judicial torture and helped with his work on the scaffold; they were charged with the transport of dead bodies of convicts from the prison to the gallows (invariably located at the periphery of the jurisdiction), where they had to hang them in chains or bury their remains. Their ritual uncleanliness resulted from their handling "matter out of place" and forced them to live at the outskirts of the villages and towns, prevented them from marrying outside their occupational group, and made it difficult for them to find other work. As a consequence, the skinners constituted a widespread, regional, and endogamous network.[6] **(fig.1)**

The women who participated in the outings of the bands dressed as men and some of them showed a capacity for great cruelty. Among them we find wives, sisters,

and daughters of skinners, which reflects the close-knit character of the first bands (Blok 1995:57-88, 435-36). When in the later bands the number of skinners decreased, the participation of women also dwindled.

Faced with economic hardship in the postwar years and virtually barred from other work because of their "pollution," the skinners could draw on their far-flung occupational network and the cultural capital entailed by their profession to organize themselves in bands across the borders of the Lower Meuse. Thus the skinners not only dominated the first bands in terms of numbers, they also had an important part in the preparation and organization of the raids, and the division of the booty and the sale of stolen goods (through Jewish receivers in the bigger towns) were mostly in their hands. To understand their prominence (which they maintained in the later bands even though their numerical dominance had drastically decreased), the implications of their profession deserve closer scrutiny.

The skinners shared their low social status, their peripheral location, and their mobility with other occupational groups that were strongly represented in the bands. We hear of peddlers, part-time beggars, musicians, jugglers, carters, retail merchants, innkeepers, and ex-soldiers. Although all these people had a fixed residence (and thus certainly did not belong to the *fahrende Leute*), they moved a lot between the villages and towns, while some of them, most notably the innkeepers and shoemakers, formed main junctions of social networks.[7] Apart from these more or less itinerant folk (including the spinners and weavers, who were strongly represented in the later bands), the skinners also maintained relations with other professional killers, like butchers and other craftsmen involved in leatherwork -- saddlers, shoemakers, and cobblers.

The bands were thus tied together by occupational links, kinship, and marriage (which were certainly not restricted to the group of skinners). But local bonds were also important. It is striking that the vast majority of the *Bokkeryders* were settled in smaller neighbourhoods and hamlets near the bigger villages and on the outskirts of these places. Some of these settlements were built on poor soils (heath), like Heerlerheide and Chèvremont, and developed a distinct subculture. Given their mobility and peripheral location, the *Bokkeryders* could not be easily subjected to tight forms of social control. These conditions held particularly true for the skinners, who could organize themselves over considerable distances. For a long time, they did so much more successfully than did the judicial authorities, who were bound to small jurisdictions. In a way, therefore, the regional, endogamous network of the skinners provided the infrastructure of the first bands. Many outings in those years had, indeed, the character of family affairs.

No less important for understanding the organization of the *Bokkeryders* bands

and the collective violence they deployed were other implications of the skinning trade. Visiting farms at unusual times enabled the skinners to acquire an intimate knowledge of the area in which they worked. Their sense of place must have been formidable, for they could find their way in the middle of the night around a large area, going to the rendezvous and target and returning home before dawn, every step of which required precise timing. Even more than the peddlers, carters, entertainers, and other itinerant people, the skinners had an excuse to hang around at unlikely times and places. As they were the emergency butchers, their presence at uncommon times and places did not raise suspicion, nor did their transport of heavy packs and bundles. The cultural capital entailed by the skinning trade also included skills in the use of violence and inflicting pain as well as familiarity with death. From descriptions of the raids on farms and rectories given by both victims and offenders, we learn that the skinners did not hesitate to use the same means on their victims that they employed in their work with animals and in their role as the executioner's assistant.

The circumstances bearing on the social and spatial organization of the skinners and their allies cannot, of course, explain why these people organized themselves in robber bands and secret societies, breaking into churches and farmhouses, maiming and sometimes killing the habitants. These circumstances only tell us how the skinners and their accomplices could operate. They throw light on their power chances *vis-à-vis* the authorities, who were tied to jurisdictions of limited size. At this point, we have to consider the cultural aspects of collective violence and the way in which notions of identity, pride, and meaning were implied in banditry and its repression. We take our clues from the more "expressive" aspects of the raids, from what these outings had to "say."

Violation from below

It is obvious that the skinners and various of their associates provided the community with indispensable services. Yet the established rural population of farmers (from whom the local authorities were largely recruited) excluded them from their ranks. It should not surprise us, therefore, that the *Bokkeryders* -- from their first outings in the early 1730s to their very last one at the end of 1774 -- directed their operations against the principal symbols of the rural community: churches and farms. Even if the stigmatization to which the skinners and their associates were subjected may have provided them with a cause, we are still left with the question of why the bands took shape around 1730 and not before.

It is very likely that the skinners in the Lower Meuse enjoyed a certain measure

of prosperity in the decades around 1700. Both the military operations that afflicted the area until the early eighteenth century and the cattle plagues that struck various regions of western Europe between 1713 and 1719 may have favoured the skinning trade as much as they must have taken a toll on the farmers. By about 1720 these afflictions came to a temporary halt, but this meant that prosperous times for the skinners had gone. As mentioned before, wars and other military operations, including military presence, provided work not only for those taking part in them but also for people whose services were required to sustain military activities. Among these, we find skinners, butchers, tanners, saddlers, shoemakers, blacksmiths, locksmiths, and other ironworkers -- occupations that were all strongly represented in the bands.[8] There are various indications of a marked decrease in employment for skinners, in particular, in the 1720s and 1730s. Some of them had to insist on their local monopoly; others were continually on the move in search of work; still others removed their business to other locations. As skinners they had few chances of finding employment outside their trade.

Although artisans remained prominent, the later bands also included people from different backgrounds and with different aims. In the 1750s and 1760s the bands came under the control of a local *chirurgijn* ("surgeon") who had been an officer in the Austrian army and who could rely on pre-existing networks of the robbers as well as on the services of a string of innkeepers and various shoemakers -- professions that had also been salient in the first bands.[9] In this way, the bands which had been and continued to be a segmented assortment of secret societies, were cast in a military mould. Recruitment became a serious business, more important than the raids themselves, which, apart from five large-scale outings in the Duchy of Gulick in a single year (1770), took place less frequently and were hardly profitable. The operations of the *Bokkeryders* in this stage looked very much like those of a *Freikorps* or militia in the making.[10] Whatever the ulterior political aims the leaders may have had in mind (and one cannot exclude the possibility of a secessionist movement), their project proved abortive when the authorities started the massive round-ups of *Bokkeryders* in early 1771 after an outing, not authorized by the leaders, had led to the discovery of the bands.

The raids on churches, especially frequent in the early years when the bands were dominated by the skinners, involved more than the theft of goods and money -- not only because the goods included sacred objects. By itself, breaking into a church was already an act with strong symbolic overtones. Since the church, as a centre of sociability, formed the core of the community and was the "House of God," such intrusions were defined as major violations and, if followed by theft, were considered sacrilege and were punished "with fire," a sanction that evokes images of pollution and

purification of both the church and the community of believers.[11] As Firth reminds us, this community of believers forms a body -- the Body of Christ, its members being in mystical union with Him: the elect are knit together "in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord," as the Book of Common Prayer phrases it.[12] The attacks on churches assumed the features of what E.P. Thompson called the "counter-theatre" of the poor.[13] On several occasions, the operations included parodies of the Mass, during which one of the leaders acted as a "priest" and distributed the Host among his followers. These performances involved the violation of another body: the Eucharistic Body of Christ, the consecrated bread (and wine) that is received in Holy Communion.

"Every religious ceremony creates the possibility of a black mass," wrote Goffman (1967:86). Through parody and contrast, the skinners imitated and at the same time distorted and violated the Holy Communion. The profanations with the *Corpus Christi* in an inverted mass foreshadowed the initiation rituals, the first of which may have taken place as early as 1737. With the expansion of the bands the counter-theatre of the *Bokkeryders* received further elaboration in secret ceremonies that marked incorporation into the bands. These ceremonies served as an offensive and subversive frame for the recruitment of new members. On these occasions the initiates were encouraged to affront holy bodies: images, icons, and effigies of the Virgin, the saints, and Christ. New members had to swear an oath of allegiance in wayside chapels and other liminal locations. The ceremonies took the form of an inverted Roman Catholic liturgy and were performed in front of an improvised altar with burning candles, holy statuettes, and images of saints. The neophytes had to spit on a crucifix, throw it on the floor and step on it while renouncing God and the Holy Mother and swearing allegiance to the Devil, promising secrecy and commitment to theft. On some occasions the initiation ceremonies took place around a burning candle put into a dead man's hand cut off from the corpse of an executed criminal to which the skinners, because of their profession, had easy access. Credited with magical power, the so-called *Diebshand* or *Diebslicht* ("thief's hand," "thief's light") was believed to facilitate burglaries: it would open locks, put the victims to sleep, prevent them from waking up, or, if awake, keep them from speaking, moving, and so on.[14]

The simple symbolic act of stepping and spitting on a crucifix also included references to that other Body of Christ -- the community of believers. In this way the sacrileges helped the initiates to separate themselves from "society" and become members of a counter-society of sorts. For the skinners and several of their associates, this separation also involved an "imitation" -- the working of the mimetic faculty -- since they had already been excluded from ordinary social life because of their

occupation, their social exclusion being symbolised by their spatial segregation.

As is the case with rites of passage elsewhere, the secret meetings of the *Bokkeryders* must have enhanced the social cohesion of the robbers' network and underscored the difference between them and ordinary people (La Fontaine 1985:58,72-3). The initiation rituals (from which women were virtually excluded) may also have reinforced the *Bokkeryders'* daring. They made their appearance at the time when the bands started to grow rapidly and could no longer be tied together solely by links of kinship, marriage, friendship, occupation, and other local bonds. But these ties continued to play a significant role -- both in terms of structure and in terms of sentiment. The robbers emphasized "equality" and, during the third and last phase, the imminent foundation -- by violent means -- of a "New Kingdom" and a "Brotherhood of Happiness" (Blok 1995:113-52).

It must have been the news about the initiation ceremonies as well as the remarkable mobility of the bands that earned the robbers the epithet of "*Bokkeryders*" (German: *Bockreiter*), that is, "goat riders", a popular name bestowed on them only in the early 1770s when the last trials were in full swing and by which they have been known ever since. One does not find this denomination in the court records, which speak of "bandits," "night thieves," "extortioners," "members of the famous band," and the like, although the judges acknowledged the existence of a sworn confederacy. Rooted in an ancient and widespread folk belief that associates the billy goat with evil and the Devil and his work, the use of the name "Bokkeryders" suggests that the speaker regarded the robbers as antisocial and attributed to them supernatural power -- the ability to make magical, nocturnal flights on animals to far-off places to steal and make their rendezvous.[15] But we do not know, of course, for whom -- and for how many contemporaries -- the name may have had ironic connotations.[16]

After having sketched the main features of the context in which collective violence from below took shape, it is tempting to reflect briefly on the subversive bent of the swearing of the formulaic oath, the "sacrilegious oath," as the judicial authorities phrased it, because it shows how closely popular and elite traditions and both forms of collective violence, were related. Always the focal point of initiation rituals of secret societies, among the *Bokkeryders* the oath taking took up most of the ceremony. It included references to (and suggested similarities with) proofs of allegiance and incorporation into four major social institutions: first Holy Communion, enrollment in the army, recruitment for the local *schutten* ("civil guard"), and the installation of new members of the local court. These inaugurations were imitated and at the same time, together with the institutions, parodied and subverted. Tellingly, the main locations for the oath taking ceremonies during the 1750s and 1760s, when membership was soaring,

were wayside chapels. One of them, the Saint Leonardus chapel, was situated on a hill of the same name, not far from the Rolduc monastery. During the repression of the bands in the early 1770s, the authorities required an additional place for the gallows; they demolished this profaned chapel and raised the new gallows on the place of the former sanctuary. These displacements and substitutions involved a twofold mimesis of attacks on bodies and provide an example of the dialogue or "circulation" between popular culture and elite culture.[17] This brings us to the second form of collective violence: the means the authorities had at their disposal to repress banditry in the fragmented territories of the Lower Meuse.

The Repression

For a long time the local courts charged with the prosecution of criminals in their relatively small jurisdictions were ignorant of the real authors of the plundering of churches and farms. The magistrates believed that groups of vagrants were responsible for these crimes. All they could do in the absence of a regional police force was to enforce the *plakkaten* ("decrees") against these people and insist on the vigilance of the local civic guard. In each of the three great operations against the *Bokkeryders*, local courts started their cooperation (exchanging information, handing over prisoners) only after the first members of the bands had been arrested. It is also telling that local prosecutors depended on the "mistakes" made by those members of the band who went on haphazard and unauthorized outings or were recognized by their victims, as happened in 1741, 1750, 1770, 1773, and 1774.

As noted before, magistrates of several local courts were related by ties of kinship and marriage, which facilitated their cooperation. Yet in the absence of a regular police force and houses of correction, the courts did not have means to repress the bands other than by theatrical violence, terror, and defamation -- as explicitly specified in the motive for capital sentences, "*tot afschrik en exempel*" ("to inspire fear and set an example"), and in the additional stipulation that the body of the convict should be denied a Christian burial. For these reasons alone, it would be wrong to consider the hangings between 1741 and 1778 in these territories -- there were more than 300 of them -- in only instrumental or pragmatic terms, that is, as simple eliminations. Such an approach to collective violence from above would indeed miss the main point of criminal law under the *ancien régime*: the refusal of burial added infamy to death (cf. Linebaugh 1975; Spierenburg 1984; Rupp 1992).

In all recorded cases of hangings, the body of the condemned was to hang in chains for birds to feed on until its total decomposition and decay. In their denial of a

burial in consecrated earth and their spectacular displacement of the convict from the centre (church) to the periphery (veld, heather, moors), the punishments represented major cultural inversions. As extreme, public assaults on the body, they brought ultimate outrages to a person's honour and status and to the reputation of his family and descendants as well. Thus the imagery of the violated body of convicts assumed great importance during the repression of the bands. Leaving aside the phases of arrest, detention, and the rituals of judicial torture -- which constituted serious infringements on a person's honour and status, mediated by his physical body -- we will examine briefly the ritual and symbolic aspects of the sentences and their execution.

The magical realism of the repression was most noticeable when the accused was a fugitive and was tried *in absentia*. In most cases these persons were banished, *voor eeuwig* ("for ever"), from the Dutch or Austrian territories, with the specification that they would be subjected to capital punishment if they returned. This written sentence was read in public and then nailed to the gallows. But we know of at least fourteen such cases (in which the accused had ignored the court's citations and remained at large) in which the absent convict was hanged in effigy. An ordinary banishment did not suffice, and the convicted person -- by means of an effigy, a dummy, an imitation of his body -- had to be magically removed from the community. Like produces like, and like acts upon like (cf. Mauss 1972:64 ff.; Tambiah 1985:64-72).

Attacks on the social identity of the convicts were also evident in three recorded cases in which the court ordered that the convicts' houses be destroyed, with the stipulation that their locations were not to be built on for a period of a hundred years "because of the horrible crimes committed by the owner and because it has served as shelter and rendezvous for thieves and *schelmen* ("rogues")." The attack on one's house or home -- a quintessential *lieu de mémoire* -- making the convict posthumously homeless, provides us with another instance of ritual cleansing, of an attempt to remove a polluted person magically from the community and from social memory as well.

The punishment directed against the house of the convict perhaps illustrates the interplay between elite culture and popular culture, the dialogue between authority and subversion. Some of the operations of the bands, most notably some of the attacks on farms that were also inns, involved willful destruction of furniture, doors, windows, closets, barrels, and the like. This violence against property looks like acts of revenge and bears some resemblance to the more violent forms of *charivari* or "rough music," forms of popular justice that in the German areas were called *Wüstung* or destruction and were intended to drive the residents out of the community as undesirable persons (Meuli 1975:457-75).

An important aspect of the collective violence inflicted on the *Bokkeryders* concerns its topography: the space of violence and death. Situated at the limits of the jurisdictions, the place of execution was a clearly demarcated location, usually an elevation or hill. The condemned had to be escorted from that other space of violence, the place of detention, usually located in the basement of one of the castles or country houses, all the way down to the outskirts of his hometown. These processions were very much part of the choreography of punishment since they reinforced humiliation and disgrace. Each punishment also conveyed something of the crime that had been committed. Ordinary thieves were whipped and banished; those who had committed qualified thefts were hanged; murderers and bandit leaders were broken on the wheel; and arson and sacrilege (for example, church robberies) were punished by various forms of burning (cf. Foucault 1977:43). In some cases, elements of the crime were literally reproduced in the punishment. Such re-enactments happened at the execution of some of the condemned who had blackened their faces when breaking into farms and had sworn allegiance to the Devil. As Radbruch notes in his commentary on the *Carolina* (1532): "Wer mit dem Feuer gesundet hat, der Brandstifter, der Münzfalscher, soll durch das *Feuer* sterben [Who has sinned with fire -- the arsonist, the counterfeiter -- should die by fire]" (1960:10; see also Langbein 1974:167). In short, the collective violence the authorities deployed to repress banditry revolved around terror and infamy. Hence the major elements of the punishments included the disintegration of the corpse and the denial of funeral rites.

The popular sensibilities regarding the integrity of the body and *post-mortem* care are obvious from attempts to intervene in the judicial process. We know of attempts to remove the bodily remains of kinsmen from the gallows at night and to provide for a decent burial. If discovered, such ventures were defined as theft and punished. For those who had died in detention, the authorities had, in most cases, no less dishonourable punishments in store. A sentence was passed on the corpse, which the skinner then had to drag on a sledge to the gallows to be buried there or to be hanged to rot, depending on the condition of the remains. We know of a widow whose husband had died in detention without a confession and had been buried under the gallows. She wrote a request to the States General in The Hague in which she asked for a revision of the dishonourable sentence, explicitly referring to the role of the skinner, and for a Christian burial for her husband. Her request was denied. Before it had passed sentence on the corpse, the court had (according to a standard procedure) asked advice from a lawyer in Maastricht. This impartial legal expert had suggested that the body should be returned to the next of kin and be "buried *de noctu* ("at night"), without homage, but also without any offense against it from the department of executioner and

skinner" (Blok 1995:168-71, 417).

The image of the decaying body is of considerable interest, and not only in the context of the repression of robber bands accused of theft and sacrilege. The decomposed, corrupt body enshrines a powerful metaphor. As Bruce Lincoln has pointed out in a different but very similar context -- the notorious exhumation and public display of the long-buried corpses of priests, nuns, and saints in several towns and cities in Spain during the Civil War -- the image of bodily decomposition provides a metaphor of moral corruption: "Like its near-synonyms *rottenness* and *decadence*, corruption is most concretely and emphatically manifest in the state of bodily decomposition" (Lincoln 1985:257). From a theological point of view, bodily corruption

> is a moral process as much as a natural one, for decay is the final physical result of a sinful -- that is to say, corrupt -- life. And what is more, the bodies of those who are purified of sin through the sacraments of the Church and the practice of a saintly life do not decay, but partake of eternity, freedom from decomposition being one of the foremost proofs of sanctity (Lincoln 1985:257).

Conclusion

Considering the extent to which elite culture and popular culture in the Lower Meuse formed models of and for one another, it would certainly not be an exaggeration to say that they developed in a mutually constitutive relationship. There was indeed a great deal of "reflection" -- imitation, mimicry, parody -- on the part of subaltern groups, while the violence of the punishments reflected something of the scale, volume, form, and meaning of the crimes, real and imagined. The massive violence that both groups inflicted upon the other (unprecedented in the history of the Dutch Republic and strangely neglected in official Dutch historiography) and its explicit magical realism cannot be understood without reference to the main features of these territories: their political fragmentation, their peripheral location, and their seigneurial structure, which juxtaposed aristocratic splendour with plebeian misery. It is obvious that these conditions provided considerable space for dissident groups.

But these circumstances also prompted and shaped the repression. Confronted with massive and sustained forms of subversion, members of the ruling class, loosely tied together in a regional network of kinship and marriage, restored their domination through the theatre of law, drowning the voices of insubordination in the process. In this assertion of cultural hegemony, the courtroom, the place of detention, the street, and the

place of execution provided the setting for the emphasis on and dramatization of the distinction between the integral body, on the one hand, and the violated, dishonoured, and decaying body, on the other -- a distinction that magically served the restoration as a *pars pro toto*.

NOTES

1. Most of the surviving court records are preserved in the State Archives at Maastricht (RA LvO). For a detailed account of the sources, see Blok (1995:235-445).
2. Cagnetta's sketch of the *bardana* (razzia) in Orgosolo, Sardinia (1963:90-102) provides a good example of the momentary and transitional character of banditry. These aspects are also given emphasis in Vittorio De Seta's film *Banditi a Orgosolo* (1961). See also Wilson's superb account of feuding and banditry in Corsica (1988:335-76).
3. On the military and political history of the Lower Meuse, see Wouters (1970); Haas (1978); and Gutmann (1980).
4. For the importance of the gentry in the Lower Meuse, see Wouters (1970:325-28); Haas (1978:202-06, 234-36); and Janssen de Limpens (1982). E.P. Thompson writes that ruling-class control in eighteenth-century England "was located primarily in a cultural hegemony, and only secondarily in an expression of economic or military power" (1978:254).
5. The quintessential role of secrecy in social life was long ago recognized by Simmel, who regarded the secret, the hiding of realities by negative or positive means, as one of man's greatest achievements (1950:330, 345-6).
6. In some European areas the skinner remained a social outcast until the end of the nineteenth century (cf. Weiss 1946:113).
7. On the subversive role of taverns and inns, see Scott, who writes: "Here subordinate classes met offstage and off-duty in an atmosphere of freedom encouraged by alcohol" (1990:121-22). See also Burke (1978:109-11). On the pivotal role of *cabaretiers* in the *Bande d'Orgères*, see Cobb (1972:191). For the influence of innkeepers in Dutch village life, see Wichers (1965:37-3 8). On the leading role of shoemakers in popular movements in early modern Europe, see Hobsbawm & Scott (1980).
8. The vicissitudes of the Eta in Japan, a despised occupational group that specialized in butchering, tanning, and leatherwork (which in a Buddhist society are considered defiling pursuits), were, in this respect, very similar to those of the skinners in the Lower Meuse. They were prosperous during the period of civil wars when their services were in much demand. But the Eta suffered during the relative peace of the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), when their trades lost the importance they had held during the time of civil war, and discrimination against them intensified (cf. Price 1972).
9. In eighteenth-century France (and elsewhere), surgeons were the primary medical practitioners and have been called "the physicians of the poor." The development of their profession was stimulated by the rise of the standing army in the seventeenth century. See Wellman (1992:16-17, 29).
10. On the genesis of the *Freikorps* in the German territories in the mid-eighteenth century, see Childs (1982:119).

11. The *Carolina* (1532) specifies punishments for these forms of sacrilege (Radbruch 1960:172 ff.). For similar cases of theft from churches in eighteenth-century France -- and similar punishments, see Ferrand (1989:65, 71-73), on which I have drawn in some detail.
12. In his remarks on the symbolism of the body, Firth (1973:227) distinguishes between three bodies of Christ: the physical body, the mystical body, and the Eucharistic body.
13. There is little doubt about the presence of elements of protest and parody in the way a successful theft from a church was celebrated. Cf. Thompson (1978:254 and 1974:3 87). For an extensive documentation of more covert forms of protest and resistance, see Scott (1990:136 ff).
14. This belief seems to have been common in early modern Europe: "Die vom Galgen abgeschnittene Diebshand sichert, beim Stehlen angezundet, das Gelingen des Raubs [The thief's hand, cut off from a corpse on the gallows, when lit during the robbery, assures success]" (Danckert 1963:42). See also Bachtold-Staubli (1929/30:229-31). On the luckbringing power of the Diebsdaum ("thief's thumb"), see Angstmann (1928:93-94). For a general account of the magical power of liminal material, see Leach (1964; 1976:33-36, 61-62, and *passim*).
15. Courts in western Europe had long since lost interest in demonology (Levack 1987:170 ff.). This was particularly the case in the Low Countries, which saw few witch trials anyway and dropped the subject long before its heyday in Germany and France. The sentences in the Lower Meuse that contained explicit references to the oath taking phrased this profanity invariably in terms of blasphemy or sacrilege, that is, "*de godslasterlijke eed.*"
16. Two contemporary reports refer to the denomination "Bokkeryders," but they merely record the use of the term and the associated folk belief, while expressing personal reservations; see Mengels ([1773] 1887:269); Sleinada (1779:61-62). One cannot, of course, exclude the possibility that for some people the initiation rituals of the robbers and the term "Bokkeryders" included references to representations current during the witch trials in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
17. Ginzburg quoted in Luria & Gandolfo (1986:108).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Angstmann, Else

1928 *Der Henker in der Volksmeinung. Seine Namen und sein Vorkommen in der mundlichen Volksüberlieferung*. Bonn: Fritz Klopp Verlag.

Bächtold-Stäubli, Hans (Ed.)

1929/30 "Dieb, Diebstahl." In: *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglauben*. Vol. II. Berlin/Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter Verlag.

Blok, Anton

1995 *De Bokkerijders. Roversbenden en geheime genootschappen in de Landen van Overmaas, 1730-1774*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker/Prometheus. Revised edition.

Braudel, Fernand

1973 *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II* [1949]. Tr. Sian Reynolds. New York: Harper & Row. Vol. 2.

Burke, Peter
1978 *Popular culture in early modern Europe.* New York: Harper & Row.
Cagnetta, Franco
1963 *Bandits d'Orgoloso* [1954]. Tr. Michel Thurlotte. Parios: Buchet/Castel.
Childs, John
1982 *Armies and warfare in Europe, 1648-1789.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Cobb, Richard
1972 "La bande d'Orgères, 1790-1799." In: Richard Cobb, *Reactions to the French Revolution.* London: Oxford University Press.
Comaroff, Jean
1985 *Body of power, spirit of resistance. The culture and history of a South African people.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Danckert, Werner
1963 *Unehrliche Leute. Die verfemten Berufe.* Bern/München: Francke Verlag
Ferrand, Renaud
1989 "Le vol dans les églises en Lyonnais et en Beaujoulais (1679-1789): le sacrilège des exclus." *Bulletin du Centre d'Histoire Économique et Sociale de la Région Lyonnaise* 2, pp. 43-76.
Firth, Raymond
1973 *Symbols public and private.* London: Allen & Unwin.
Foucault, Michel
1977 *Discipline and punish. The birth of prison* [1975]. Tr. Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon Books.
Goffman, Erving
1967 "The nature of deference and demeanor" [1956]. In: Erving Goffmann, *Interaction ritual.* New York: Pantheon Books
Gutmann, Myron P.
1980 *War and rural life in the early modern Low Countries.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Haas J.A.K.
1978 *De verdeling van de Landen van Overmaas*, 1644-1662. Assen: Van Gorcum.
Hobsbawm, Eric J. and Joan Wallach Scott
1980 "Political shoemakers." *Past & Present* 89, pp. 86-114.
Janssen de Limpens, K.J.Th.
1982 "Genealogische en biografische geschiedenis van het geslacht De Limpens." *Publications* 11, pp. 9-53
La Fontaine, Jean
1985 *Initiation.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Langbein, John H.
1974 *Prosecuting crime in the Renaissance.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
Leach, E.R.
1964 "Anthropological aspects of language: Animal categories and verbal abuse." In: E.H. Lenneberg (Ed.), *New directions in the study of language.* Cambridge, Mass.
1966 "Ritualization in man in relation to conceptual and social development." In: Julian Huxley (Ed.), *A discussion on ritualization of behaviour in animals and man. Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, Series B, Vol. 251, pp. 403-408.

1976 *Culture and communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Levack, Brian P.

1987 *The witch-hunt in early modern Europe*. London/New York: Longman.

Lincoln, Bruce

1985 "Revolutionary exhumations in Spain, July 1936." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, pp. 241-260.

Linebaugh, Peter

1975 "The Tyburn Riot against the surgeons." In: Douglas Hay et al., *Albion's fatal tree. Crime and society in eighteenth-century England*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Luria, Keith and Romulo Gandolfo

1986 "Carlo Ginzburg: An interview." *Radical History Review* 35, pp. 89-111.

Mauss, Marcel

1972 *A general theory of magic* [1903]. Tr. Robert Brian. London: Routledge.

Mengels, Winand

1887 *Memory of Kronyckboek*, etc. [1773]. *Publications* 24, pp. 167-297.

Meuli, Karl

1975 "Über einige alte Rechtsbräuche/Charivari." In: Karl Meuli, *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. I. Basel: Schwabe & Co. Verlag.

Price, John

1972 "A history of the outcaste: Untouchability in Japan." In: George De Vos & Hiroshi Wagatsuma (Eds), *Japan's invisible race*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University or California Press.

Radbruch, Gustav (Ed.)

1960 *Die peinliche Gerichtsordnung Karls V. von* 1532 (*Carolina*). Stuttgart: Reclam.

Rupp, Jan C.C.

1992 "Michel Foucault, body politics and the rise and expansion of modern anatomy." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 5. pp. 31-60.

Scott, James C.

1990 *Domination and the arts of resistance. Hidden transcripts*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Simmel, Georg

1950 *The secret society [1908]. The sociology of Georg Simmel*. Tr. Kurt H. Wolff. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press.

Sleinada, S.J.P.

1779 *Oorsprong, oorzaeke, bewys en ondekkinge van een godlooze bezwoorne bende nachtdieven en knevelaers binnen de Landen van Overmaeze and aenpaelende landtstreeken ontdekt,* etc. Maastricht. Reprint 1972.

Spierenburg, Pieter

1984 *The spectacle of suffering. Executions and the evolution of repression: From a preindustrial metropolis to the European experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tambiah, S.J.

1985 *Culture, thought, and social action. An anthropological perspective*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Thompson, E.P.

1974 "Patrician society, plebeian culture." *Journal of Social History* 7, pp. 382-405

1978 "Folklore, anthropology, and social history." *Indian Historical Review* 3, pp. 247-266.

Thurlings, Th.J.M. & A.A.P. van Drunen

1960 "Sociaal-economische geschiedenis." *Limburgs Verleden* 1, pp. 191-247.

Tilly, Charles

1978 "Anthropology, history, and the Annales." *Review* 1, 3/4, pp. 207-213.

Wallerstein, Immanuel

1974 *The modern world-system.* New York: Academic Press.

Weiss, Richard

1946 *Volkskunde der Schweiz. Grundris.* Erlenbach-Zürich: Eugen Rentsch Verlag.

Wellman, Kathleen

1992 *La Mettrie. Medicine, philosophy, and Enlightenment.* Durham/London: Duke University Press.

Wichers, A.J.

1965 *De oude plattelandsbeschaving. Een sociologische bewustwording van de 'overherigheid.'* Assen: Van Gorcum.

Wilson, Stephen

1988 *Feuding, conflict, and banditry in nineteenth-century Corsica.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wouters, H.H.E.

1970 *Grensland en bruggehoofd. Historische studies met betrekking tot het Limburgse Maasdal en, meer in het bijzonder, de stad Maastricht.* Assen: Van Gorcum

Table 1. Number of Bokkerijders Brought to Trial, 1741–1778

Outcome of Trial	1st Phase	2nd Phase	3rd Phase	Total
Tried and sentenced	113	27	371	511
Tried but sentence unknown	54	2	28	84
Unknown*	50	6	3	59
Total	217	35**	402	654

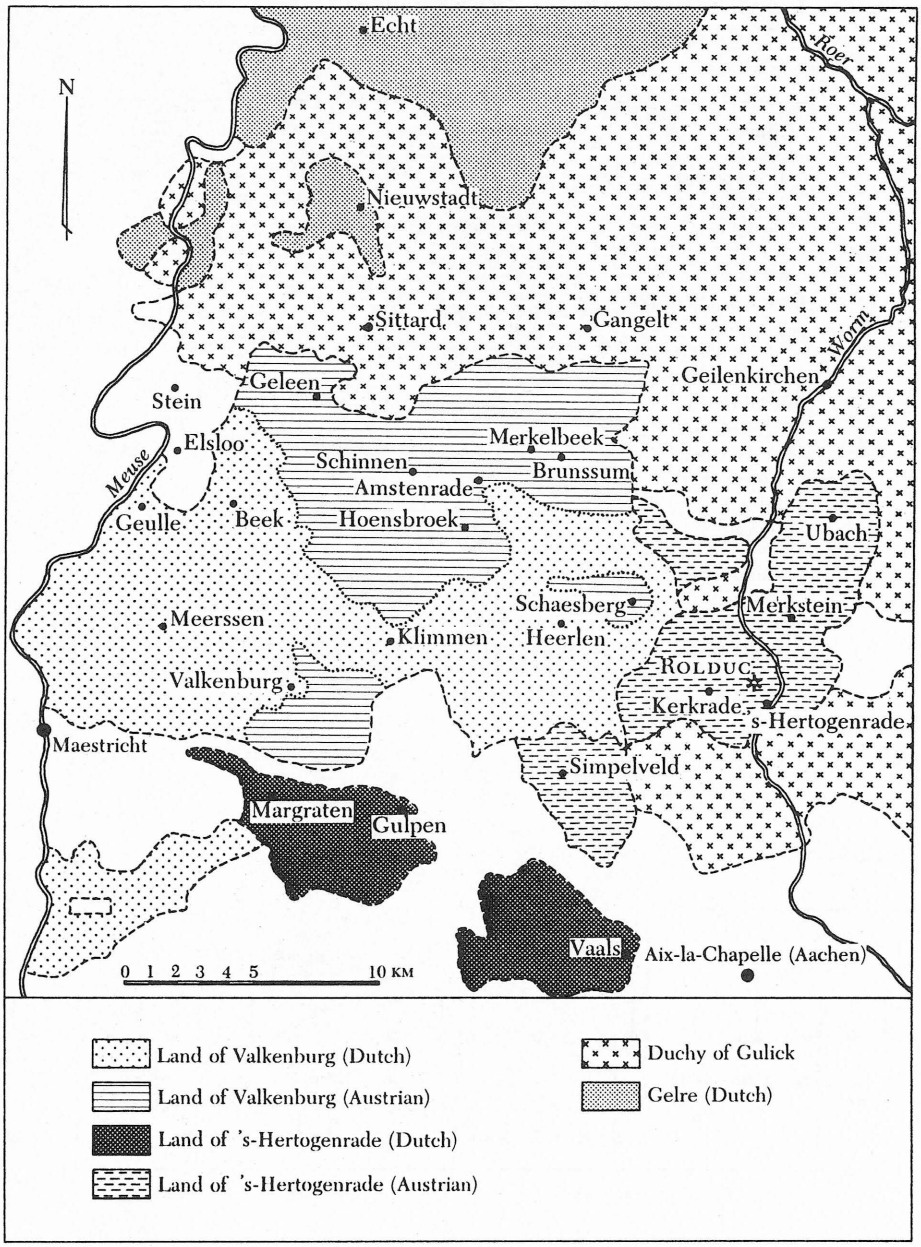
*All these people were mentioned as accomplices in the records. If they were tried, the trial records did not survive.

**Five of these people had also been active in the first period, which brings the total down from 654 to 649, including 36 women (30 of whom were active in the first period).

Table 2. Outcome of Trials against Bokkerijders, 1741–1778

Sentence/Outcome	1st Phase	2nd Phase	3rd Phase	Total
Death sentence not specified, but presumably gallows	4	—	45	49
Gallows	45	16	191	252
Gallows and additional punishments	1	1	1	3
Broken on the wheel	—	1	4	5
Broken on the wheel and additional punishments	5	—	1	6
Garroted	—	—	2	2
Garroted and additional punishments	27	—	—	27
Decapitated	6	—	—	6
Decapitated and additional punishments	4	—	—	4
Died in detention	11	4	31	46
Banishments	3	—	11	14
Convicted in absentia: banishment	1	—	64	65
Convicted in absentia: hanged in effigy	1	5	5	11
Confinement	—	—	3	3
Released from detention	5	—	12	17
Warrant for arrest refused	1	—	1	2
Total	114	27	371	512*

*These 512 sentences (verdicts) concern 511 persons because one person was tried and convicted two times: a woman from the first period was first banished after being flogged and branded, then later sent to the gallows and hanged.

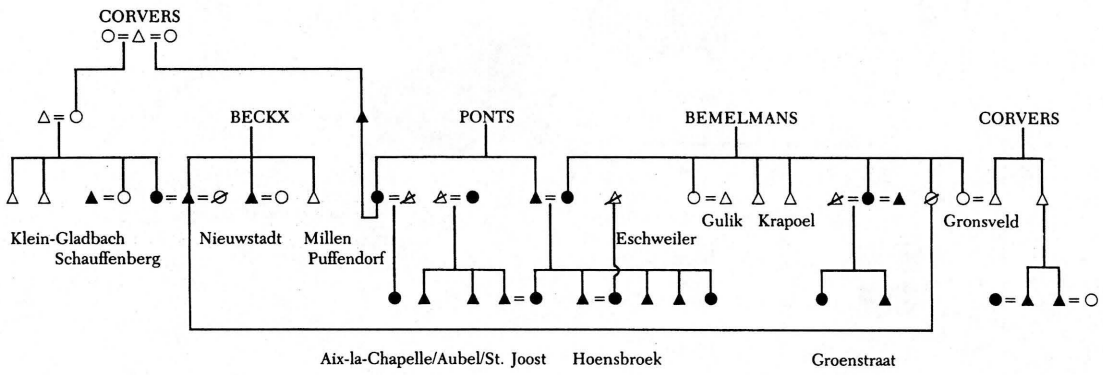


Map 1. Political fragmentation of the eastern Meuse Valley, 1715–1785

Table 3. Occupational Background of Bokkerijders

	1st Phase	2nd Phase	3rd Phase	Total
Artisans	61	14	135	210
Skinners	17	—	5	22
Ironworkers	17	4	18	39
Shoemakers	5	7	20	32
Saddlers	1	—	6	7
Spinners and weavers	14	2	44	60
Others	7	1	42	50
Commerce/transport	21	4	31	56
Agriculture	10	5	70	85
Day laborers	8	3	50	61
Farmers	2	2	20	24
Authorities	3	3	11	17
Miscellaneous	27	2	30	59
Innkeepers	5	—	10	15
Entertainers	6	—	3	9
Miners	6	—	2	8
Beggars	4	1	4	9
Soldiers*	6	1	5	12
Others	—	—	6	6
Total	122	28	277	427

Note: Occupational background is available for only two-thirds of the Bokkerijders.
*An additional dozen of the robbers for whom we know occupations also had military experience.



Source: Archival records researched by the author.

fig.1 Endogamous Network of Skinners in the Lower Meuse, 1730-1743